



June 29 – 30, 2007

San Antonio Downtown Development Work Sessions



Prelude...

- *The downtown development process is not a sprint, it is a marathon race. It is not about “immediate gratification”, but is a process that takes years to realize results.*

Michael Stevens, Executive Director
Capitol Riverfront BID

- *“To plan is human...to implement is divine.”*

Andrew Altman, former President & CEO
Anacostia Waterfront Corporation

- *“Make no little plans, for they have no magic to stir men’s blood.”*

Daniel H. Burnham, Director of Works
World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893



Opportunity for San Antonio

- Conditions seem to exist to support a coordinated & comprehensive downtown development effort
 1. City leadership & a group of determined stakeholders
 2. Downtown is an asset w/many amenities that can serve as building blocks
 3. North River area & TIRZ have established momentum & vision of what can be accomplished
 4. Much of the groundwork has been done...from research to community vision process to planning
 5. Riverwalk expansion is another example of public infrastructure commitment that can encourage private reinvestment
 6. Multiple studies, analysis & plans underway that support effort



Elements of the Process

- Understand the economic underpinnings & market realities of downtown, adjacent neighborhoods
- Build consensus & support among the public & “stakeholders”
- Prepare & adopt a downtown development plan
- Establish a central coordinating entity
- Establish the necessary financial incentives
- Develop an implementation “action agenda” with priorities for early, mid & long-range projects
- Assign responsibilities & benchmark performance, then monitor progress annually



Understand the Market

- Demographics, development dynamic, inventories of land & lease space, parking inventory, transit ridership, employment, households, etc.
- Economic market analysis of office, residential, retail, hospitality/tourism, employment, etc.
 1. Opportunity for expansion in employment, office, housing, etc.
 2. What is future demand based on growth – what is supply?
 3. Analyze other possible growth industries
- Cost of land & leases
- Sales & property tax information, bond capacity
- Fiscal impact analysis of downtown on city revenues



Downtown Development Plan

- Plan must be adopted as public policy & based on community/stakeholder input
- Include physical framework w/recommendations:
 - Transit & Parking - Land Use/Zoning - Streetscape
 - Parks/Open Space - Infrastructure - Activity Districts
 - Development Sites - Public Facilities - Linkages
- Sub-area plans will need to be developed
- Catalytic development projects based on market realities, demand & growth potential
- Action agenda w/incentives & implementation



Fundamentals

- Create **place** – San Antonio Riverwalk extension
- Provide a high quality **public realm** – streets, sidewalks, streetscape systems, landscape, signage, clean & safe
- Get the basics right – underground **utilities & public infrastructure** (water, storm & sanitary sewer)
- Provide **access & circulation** – auto, transit, pedestrian, bike, boat – and linkages back to activity centers
- Encourage **density** & a **mix of uses**
- **Design guidelines** for private envelopes & first floor frontage
- Encourage the **arts, retail & education** uses
- Encourage **mixed income** in housing development
- Create **critical mass** through phased development



Establish Agents of Change

- Business Improvement Districts (BID)
 - “Clean & Safe” teams
 - Economic development
 - Maintenance of parks
 - Marketing & PR efforts
 - Business attraction efforts
 - Advocacy
- Development Authorities
 - Can have development powers: buy & sell land, eminent domain
 - Can administer incentives: loans, tax abatements, bond issues
 - Can more nimbly enter into contracts to implement plan
- Entity should be a public/private partnership
- Center City Commission in Memphis best example of the combination of these two models



Center City Commission

- 30+ year old organization in downtown Memphis
- Unique combination of a BID & a redevelopment agency
- Powers include:
 - PILOT tax abatements
 - Bond issues
 - Development loans
 - Design review
- Responsibilities include:
 - Safety "Ambassadors"
 - Planning & economic development
 - Marketing, PR & events
 - Research & database management
- Partnership between city, county & private sector



Some Criteria for Success

- **Political will** of local government
- **Adoption** of the plan as **public policy**
- A **market driven** range of actions supported by incentives
- A **mix of uses** to support density & a walkable urbanity (retail, office, residential, hospitality/tourism, restaurants, entertainment, groceries, sports, arts, education, museums & cultural attractions)
- A high quality **public realm** w/ongoing maintenance
- **Access, parking & circulation**
- **Marketing & promoting** downtown as the neighborhood or common ground for all citizens
- Internal & external **linkages/connections** to activity centers & surrounding neighborhoods



Development “Tool Kit”

- Tax Increment Finance (TIF) districts
- Tax abatements for eligible projects
- Capital improvement programs
- Bond issues for infrastructure improvements
- CDBG funds
- Development loans – façades, small businesses
- Land assembly or write-downs of public land
- Public parking garages as part of mixed use projects
- Percentage of deed recordation/transfer tax



Attraction Efforts

- Retail attraction as a year-round process
 1. Utilize ICSC as a platform for attraction
 2. Develop retail opportunities inventory & market
 3. Develop publications to support effort
- Residential attraction campaign
 1. Develop inventory of all available & future projects
 2. Utilize website & publications to market
 3. Use market research to target most appropriate markets
- Office attraction & retention campaigns
 1. Office tenant retention is fundamental economic development
 2. Identify new growth markets for office space



Partners in the Process

- Local Government – City of San Antonio
- County Government – Bexar County
- Downtown Alliance San Antonio
- Downtown Advisory Board
- Public Improvement District & Downtown Ops
- Chambers of Commerce
- Public/Private Partnerships
- Convention & Tourism Corporation
- Local Corporations
- Civic Stakeholders



1996 Downtown Strategic Plan

- Adopted in 1996, plan contained 26 strategies with objectives & actions
- Was the plan ultimately successful?
- What major goals/actions did it accomplish?
- Where did it fall in its aspirations?
- Did it build upon market realities?
- Did it galvanize the community into action?
- Can it be used as a platform for new efforts & greater success?
- Are any strategies/actions relevant to today's downtown?



Other Questions

- Approximately 12 other studies, analyses & plans currently in process
- How do we ensure they “talk to each other” & support the current effort?
- What planning/development projects are queuing up?
- Organizationally, who has the most responsibility for downtown development?
- Where does the process get “bogged down”?
- Is there a single point of contact for downtown planning & development efforts?
- Who is the information clearinghouse & communicates information on downtown efforts to all stakeholders?



SWOT Analysis – Strengths

- Riverwalk & hospitality/tourism industry
- Rich fabric of historic buildings – good pedestrian scale
- Fairly compact & “walkable” downtown core
- Public parking garages & circulator trolleys
- Good inventory of downtown hotels, convention center
- Mercado district w/restaurants & shops
- Rivercenter Mall as retail destination
- Alamo & surrounding environs
- Office market anchored by government, finance, & telecommunications
- Plazas & open spaces
- Cultural amenities – museums, theaters, etc.



SWOT Analysis – Weaknesses

- No critical mass of housing, lack of affordable housing
- No support services for housing – grocery store, book stores, day care, transit lines to jobs outside of core
- Lack of economic diversity – hospitality/tourism & the Riverwalk dominate
- Building inventory breaks down on edges – gaps in urban fabric & street wall continuity
- Freeways separate downtown from adjacent neighborhoods – need better linkages & connections
- Downtown has limited image or “brand” outside of Alamo, Riverwalk & convention facilities



SWOT Analysis - Opportunities

- Inventory of vacant, underutilized land in downtown & adjacent areas – opportunity for housing sites & support amenities, office development, public facilities, retail
- Political will of local government
- Cadre of corporate citizens & stakeholders
- Clean teams & ambassadors on city streets – opportunity to expand into a full time BID w/range of services
- Historic buildings & vacant upper floors an opportunity for housing, small office development
- Riverwalk expansion connects to opportunity sites & other neighborhoods north & south
- Existing parks can serve as residential catalysts (if well maintained)
- Festivals at HemisFair Park/Alamo Dome environs



SWOT Analysis – Threats

- Nature of office market – is employment expanding?
- Low density nature of entire city – need to redirect growth
- Land prices may prohibit affordable & workforce housing without subsidies
- Quality of the public realm – clean & safe issues
- Aging public infrastructure
- Quality of street level retail – too much tourist orientation, not enough retail for residents
- Alamo Dome & environs – AT&T Center outside of core
- No clear direction for downtown or recognizable advocate
- Suburban centers are a threat to future office, retail & housing markets



Concept of a Center City

- Downtown currently comprised of several distinct activity districts or geographic sub-areas
- In reality, when seen as a whole, they are the **Center City** of San Antonio
- Downtown planning efforts could be expanded to the original 36 sq. mile boundaries of the city
- Sub-areas should be linked & mutually reinforcing
- Each will require its own development plan, like the River North area
- Center City concept allows for future growth & expansion for next 25 years



Center City San Antonio

- Boundary discussion should look at connections, zoning, land use & densities
- Center City should promote policies of inclusiveness & accessibility for all citizens
- Center City should promote affordable & workforce housing & public facilities to support residents
- Linkages & access will be key – transit & circulation strategies should support a “walkable urbanity”
- Center City can address & support “green” development & environmental sustainability
- Broader approach can create overall development framework & strategies for coordinated public investment
- Builds upon Riverwalk north & south development strategies



Development Review

- Coordinate development review process & base project approvals on overall development plan
- Create a central point of coordination – make the process understandable, predictable & timely
- Evaluate all projects in relationship to goals & strategies of the development plan, not individual department standards
- Create regular review “roundtables” of all impacted agencies to provide early input into development proposals



Market & Promote Center City

- The **Center City** of San Antonio belongs to all citizens...it is common ground & everyone's neighborhood...it should be marketed & branded as such
- Develop & implement a citywide marketing campaign for the Center City, its attractions & amenities directed towards the citizens of San Antonio
- Use festivals, special events, parades, celebrations, etc. as opportunities to market Center City to the entire city & region
- Utilize publications, interactive website, radio & TV ads, etc. to promote assets beyond tourism to city
- Speak in a unified voice with a simple, on-point message about downtown, its success & appeal



Coordinating Entity – Change Agent

- One organization can oversee the downtown development process, & future sub-area planning
- Organization should be equipped with incentives & development tools – empowered to act & push action agenda
- Organization should be central contact point for all development efforts & projects in downtown (or the Center City) & information clearinghouse
- Organization can be consistent & continuous advocate as administrations & Councils change over time
- Organization should collaborate with citywide ED efforts, but remain focused on downtown/Center City



Some Friendly Observations

- It is important to develop a master development plan for the downtown/Center City – build upon previous efforts
- Don't count on one major project to be downtown's savior – use multiple, smaller catalytic projects that reinforce each other & constantly build momentum
- Establish a common vision for the future, yet be flexible in its implementation as market conditions change
- Establish a central coordinating entity, & allow time for it to lay a foundation for results
- Examine the concept of a Center City w/multiple sub-areas & opportunities for growth
- Promote a “walkable urbanity” throughout downtown & Center City
- Take the “long view” – 25 years – in your planning & development efforts



Questions...w/answers on the horizon

- Is SWOT analysis right...any additions?
- What should be the vision be for downtown/Center City?
- What should be the top priorities?
- What are impediments to progress?
 - Political climate - Organizational issues - Communication
 - Market realities - Funding - Physical issues
- What are the “hot button” issues?
- How do we galvanize support among community & foster inter-agency cooperation?
- What is the potential return on investment to city?
- Is the concept of a Center City a viable one?
- What are the next steps?



Friendly observations by...

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